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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 000477

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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN, POLISH FOREIGN MINISTERS KEEP FOCUS NARROW

Classified By: CDA Quanrud for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Despite the tense regional dynamics surrounding the visit (NATO explosions, Georgian coups and the launch of the EU's Eastern Partnership) the May 6 meeting in Moscow between Russian FM Sergey Lavrov and Polish FM Radoslaw Sikorski focused mainly on bilateral issues, according to the MFA's Director of Eastern Policy Jaroslaw Bratkiewicz. Much of the discussion was technical, designed to rejuvenate cultural ties, boost trade and investment, and resolve long-standing historical disputes. The two sides agreed to increase ministerial-level contacts, primarily in the defense and justice spheres, and increase student exchanges. The Committee on Difficult Issues will soon meet, perhaps as early as next week, to take up topics like the 1940 Katyn Massacre. Bratkiewicz said the Poles were "almost certain" that PM Vladimir Putin will visit Gdansk in September to take part in the 70th anniversary commemoration of the outbreak of World War II, but there was no clear-cut confirmation on this point from the Russians. (NB: Putin's participation is 99 percent certain, according to the Russian DCM. although the Russians have not yet agreed to a proposed trilateral meeting -- PM Tusk, German Chancellor Merkel, and Russian PM Putin -- on the margins.)

¶2. (C) The two sides agreed to begin discussions that could eventually lead to a bilateral investment agreement. Bratkiewicz explained that Warsaw had been reluctant to encourage Russian investment in Poland for much of the post-communist period, but was now more willing to welcome Russian business. An investment agreement is probably of more importance to Moscow, Bratkiewicz thought, but he cautioned that the two sides were still a long way from beginning negotiations. Moscow and Warsaw are closer to an agreement governing navigation in Vistula Bay, which both nations share. Bratkiewicz said a draft is essentially ready, but several technical issues still need to be resolved. In particular, Warsaw awaits Moscow's response to a proposal that would require both countries to respect the other's right to issue navigation permits to third-country vessels -- which has been at the core of the dispute all these years.

¶3. (C) On foreign policy, Bratkiewicz observed that the ministers only briefly touched on various regional problems. Sikorski briefed Lavrov on the EU's Eastern Partnership (EP), emphasizing that the initiative is designed to improve living standards in the target countries and increase their ties with the EU. Bratkiewicz said Lavrov seemed to be satisfied, but the Poles remain wary that Russia would react negatively once the EU begins implementation. In particular, Moscow might complain that closer integration between EU member states and countries of the former Soviet Union undermines Russian influence. Bratkiewicz said, "of course, they'd be right" to some extent, but the Poles (and the EU) would

counter-argue that integration benefits all parties, including Russia, and raises standards "universally."

¶4. (C) There were some disagreements as well, Bratkiewicz noted, but none that involved detailed discussion. The Russians complained that Poles did not respect Soviet-era licensing agreements, especially concerning production and export of weapons systems (NB: This is an allusion to Warsaw's transfer of man-portable air defense weapons to Georgia). On post-electoral protests in Moldova, Sikorski attributed the unrest to provocation by the Moldovan secret police, an argument that Lavrov rejected. The Russian FM also reacted "sarcastically" to reports that Moscow had been involved in a mutiny in the Georgian military the previous day. Lavrov denied that Moscow was involved, but Bratkiewicz said he was struck by the "palpable" animosity of the Russian side toward Georgia and, to a lesser extent, Ukraine. There was no discussion of missile defense.

¶5. (C) Overall, Bratkiewicz said Sikorski and the Poles were satisfied with the outcome of the visit. They had gone to Moscow with few expectations but came away more optimistic that bilateral relations would improve incrementally. The personal chemistry between the two ministers was good despite their divergent interpretation of events in Georgia and Moldova. Both ministers seemed genuinely interested in listening to the other's points of view, which Bratkiewicz maintained was particularly important for the Russians. That said, Bratkiewicz acknowledged that an atmosphere of residual mutual suspicion was apparent. At least until there are tangible signs of bilateral progress, this "watchfulness" would likely remain a hallmark of relations with Russia.

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¶6. (C) Comment. Sikorski picked an inopportune moment to try and advance what has always been a difficult bilateral agenda, given the recent tensions over NATO, Georgia, and Russian concerns about the launch of the EU Eastern Partnership initiative. To keep the visit from the brink of failure no doubt required some effort by both sides. In conversations prior to his departure with DCM, Sikorski had high hopes that the Vistula Bay problem would be resolved during this visit, and noted that he had asked to see Putin, a request that was turned down. At the same time, it has been a major goal this spring of the Tusk government to gain Putin's agreement to attend the September first commemoration with Germany's Merkel, and it appears that Sikorski did seal that deal. Overall, Sikorski's visit was yet another milestone in the Poles own "reset" process with the Russians, following years of chill under the Kaczynski government.

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